

Inclusive Hiring Practices in Tech

The tech sector in Canada is still predominantly male and white, and the industry suffers from underrepresentation of a range of groups, from women and people who live with disabilities to Black and Indigenous peoples.

According to a **2019 Brookfield Institute report**, which cites 2016 Census data (the most recent available), only 20% of tech workers in Canada are women, the lowest participation level of all G7 countries. Meanwhile, only 2.6% of tech workers are Black despite representing **3.5% of the population**, and a mere 1.33% are Indigenous—far below the **4.9% of the total population**.

As an employer, your company (and your industry) is at a disadvantage if you aren't hiring promising talent from underrepresented groups. After all, diverse thoughts and experiences result in better products and services. Here's how you can implement a range of practices to attract, hire and retain a more diverse group of talent.

Create Space for Underrepresented Groups

Creating space for underrepresented people in your organization starts with organizational change. Authentic change can only come by speaking directly with leaders who speak for underrepresented groups in the community.



“It’s really important to bring leaders of Indigenous organizations and organizations supporting persons with disabilities to the table to articulate what the solutions could and should be,” says Denise Shortt, TECHNATION’s senior vice president of industry development and diversity and inclusion. “As a white woman, I can talk about gender challenges, but I’m not a person of colour, and I can’t talk about how I’d be best supported when I’m not a person with a disability. So, it’s important to bring stakeholders to the table to co-create those solutions.”

One effective way to build these connections is to join business organizations. TECHNATION, for example, is a member of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. These discussions with leaders will offer valuable insight into how you could better attract and retain talent from underrepresented groups. This might include overhauling your recruitment strategies or posting jobs through organizations that are actively working to create opportunities for underrepresented talent, like **Onyx Initiative** and **PLATO Testing**.

In a similar vein, visibility is also critically important. Career Ready does a lot of work to attract underrepresented groups to our events, such as career fairs and skills challenges. As an employer participating in these events, the connections you make with students can be strong encouragement to later apply for roles within your organization. With this in mind, we've recently created a series of promotional videos that are designed to encourage this visibility—both for the students looking for placements and for the employers looking to make use of the Career Ready Program. In order to cultivate a tech future for Canada with diverse voices at the table, it has to start by filling junior positions with those same diverse voices today.



Notably, if you want to improve both diversity and your company's bottom line, start with your leadership team. According to a [2020 McKinsey & Company report](#), companies with greater gender or racial diversity in their executive teams are more likely to have above-average profits. The report's authors stress the importance of advancing diverse talent into executive, management, technical and board roles. "TECHNATION has been a strong advocate for creating board positions for women and leadership positions for women in STEM, but there's a great deal of work still to be done", says Shortt. "There are fewer women, for example, on the boards of tech companies, so then there's no diverse leadership mechanism right from the top," she explains, adding that a lack of diversity at the top signals there isn't space to grow for those in underrepresented groups. "If they don't see themselves reflected, they are less likely to enter those fields."

Put Your Culture Under the Microscope

When we talk about creating space for underrepresented groups, it's also important to look inward at your workplace culture and environment. "[It's about] ensuring that you're promoting inclusive practices and that your environment is truly inviting to underrepresented groups so that they feel comfortable there," says Shortt. If your company culture favours men, you'll have a very hard time attracting and retaining women. "You'll see women who join tech companies and then opt out because they don't feel as comfortable and the environment's not as inclusive to them," explains Shortt.

Similarly, if your culture and environment aren't inclusive and welcoming for people living with disabilities, you're likely to miss out on talented people who would have brought a fresh perspective to your organization.

Notably, when McKinsey & Company looked at employee reviews on Glassdoor and Indeed, they found that the overall sentiment on businesses' inclusivity were 61% negative (compared with a 31% negative sentiment on diversity in workplaces). In the tech industry alone, 56% of responses regarding the openness of the working environment (which includes bias and discrimination) were negative, and negativity about equality efforts were even higher, at 67%.

Reduce Unconscious Bias

Bias among recruiters and HR professionals often leads to qualified applicants not advancing in the hiring process simply **because they have a non-Anglo name**—but you can take some simple steps to eliminate this problem quite easily within your organization. “Blind CVs and blind interviews are key,” says Shortt. “If you can create a hiring process within your organization that is blind, I think you’ll see some traction with hiring great candidates who are more diverse.”

By stripping names and other identifying information from resumes, it removes any bias or prejudice from the vetting process. As for interviewing, an effective way to reduce bias is to ensure you have diversity among the interviewers.

Break Down Systemic Barriers

It's important for employers to understand systemic barriers at every stage of employment, from the challenges of gaining entry-level work experience all the way up to executive roles. For many students, unpaid internships are not financially possible—they need a paying job to cover their living and education costs. Hiring a student with a disability through a wage subsidy program, for example, enables them to gain critical early-career experience and helps them afford the cost of potential assistive technologies. Without this experience, they might be at a disadvantage to students who've had the privilege of being able to gain unpaid experience. The federally funded Career Ready Program offers increased wage subsidies for underrepresented groups, including people living with disabilities, women in STEM programs and BIPOC students. We've also partnered with Onyx Initiative and Elevate Talent to help employers tap into students from underrepresented groups.

Similarly, the **ADaPT Program**, a partnership between TECHNATION and Ryerson University's Diversity Institute, offers advanced digital and professional training to students in their final semester of study and recent graduates. The program also helps match students with employers for paid work experience, again increasing opportunities for underrepresented groups in tech.

“Recognizing both privilege and barriers is critical in hiring,” says Shortt. She bristles when leaders say they'd hire anyone with the right amount of experience. “You have to unpack the privilege of some of those candidates,” she explains. She notes women have fewer advantages than men, “and if you're Black, even less, or if you're Indigenous, none.” Career Ready helps level the playing field by creating early career opportunities to support and cultivate growth among underrepresented talent.

“Inclusive hiring requires consciously setting aside preconceived notions of what experiences tech industry employees should have,” Lisa Carroll, public sector lead at Microsoft Canada and chair of the TECHNATION Diversity Committee, explains. “It means looking to different kinds of schools, workplaces, and life paths for people who can add fresh perspectives, unique strengths, and the aptitude and passion to create what's next.”



It's also important to acknowledge the responsibility that employers have when it comes to equitable compensation among underrepresented groups. The gender pay gap for tech workers without a Bachelor's degree is about \$7,500 on average, according to the Brookfield Institute report, and the gap jumps to nearly \$19,600 among tech workers who have a Bachelor's

degree or higher.

Meanwhile, Black tech workers in Canada earn \$16,400 less, on average, than white and white-passing tech workers, and \$13,300 less than the average among all racialized tech workers. Shockingly, Inuit tech workers earn \$30,000 less than the average tech salary.

Relative experience is often touted as a differentiating factor in salary gaps between employees who have similar or equal roles and responsibilities. But systemic barriers make it harder for underrepresented groups to gain the experience that commands opportunities and higher salaries. If you want to improve inclusive hiring, you need to ensure salaries are competitive and equitable.

Stand Behind Diversity and Inclusion Practices

Diversity and inclusion training is critical to creating an open dialogue among employees and leadership. **“We all have to unpack our own story. We all have things that benefitted us and that held us back,”** notes Shortt. The opportunity to share perspectives and experiences—and to unpack privilege—can have a profound impact on your workplace culture. But it's important that these conversations continue long after training is complete.

Employers and leaders need to make a commitment to diversity and inclusion across the company. Part of creating a safe, welcoming culture is having clear practices for reporting and dealing with discrimination in the workplace. Employees need to know who they can go to if they have a complaint, and leaders need to follow through on investigations, with meaningful consequences when discrimination occurs. By taking diversity and inclusion seriously, you are creating a safe space for all people, and you can become a sought-after employer for underrepresented talent. “Transforming our industry through diversity and inclusion efforts requires broad systemic change. It's going to take sustained effort and commitment to overcome longstanding circumstances that are embedded in society,” says Carroll. “It's critical to not just value differences, or different perspectives, but to seek them out. Tapping into that collective power results in better ideas, better products and better served customers.”

Look for Non-Technical Opportunities to Hire

While tech companies need to create opportunities for tech talent who are Black, Indigenous, women and people living with disabilities, it's also important to consider the impact of diverse hiring practices in non-technical roles.

Hires in marketing, communications, sales and HR, for example, are great ways to improve diversity within your organization, and this is why Shortt is a big supporter of STEAM, which recognizes the arts as a pathway into tech in addition to science, technology, engineering and math. Specialists in these areas can bring unique experience and perspectives to the role that can help your company grow.

By instituting inclusive hiring practices within your organization and following that up with a strong diversity, equity and inclusion policy that guides your operations, you'll create more opportunities for

people who will help your business succeed, which will help you attract the best and brightest talent of the future.

Learn more about how TECHNATION is supporting diversity and industry growth [here](#).

